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Tourism Projects in Billings, Bozeman, Deer Lodge, Helena, Missoula and West Yellowstone Awarded \$300,000 in Facility Improvement Grants

(HELENA) –Governor Brian Schweitzer today announced the Montana Department of Commerce award of \$300,000 from the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP) to projects in six Montana communities. Each project sponsor will use its grant funds to complete tourism-related facility improvements.

“These tourism grant funds are significant investments in Montana’s heritage and cultural facilities and communities,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “These are facilities that highlight Montana’s uniqueness, that provide many of our 11 million visitors an authentic Montana experience while enticing them to stay in our communities longer and spend more of their dollars on Montana’s main streets.”

Montana Department of Commerce Director Anthony Preite approved the TIIP grant funding for the six tourism-related projects following recommendations from the Department of Commerce Travel Montana staff and the state’s Tourism Advisory Council. The six TIIP grant recipients were selected from 37 applications requesting \$2.27 million from the Commerce Department program.

“The investment of tourism ‘bed tax’ dollars into these six projects leverages \$5.64 million – a 19 to 1 match – in community, state, federal and foundation dollars to create and support local construction and service industry jobs,” said Preite.

The 2008 TIIP Grant Awards include:

\$67,270	Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman, for the design, construction and installation of the Explore Yellowstone: Children’s Discovery Center.
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\$25,190	International Choral Festival, Missoula, for purchase of an inflatable sound shell, risers and transport trailer for use in this week-long choral festival that brings world-class choirs from around the globe to Missoula every three years.
\$63,770	Helena Presents/Myrna Loy Center, Helena, for exterior and interior facility upgrades, signage and public art at the historic Myrna Loy Center.
\$67,270	Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center, West Yellowstone, for design and construction of the new River Valley Wolf Habitat exhibit.
\$46,500	Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, for development of Montana's first publicly accessible and interpreted permanent art collection storage facility.
\$30,000	Rialto Community Theatre, Inc., Deer Lodge, for installation of an elevator and carpeting.

Betsy Baumgart, Administrator for Travel Montana, congratulates the project sponsors for working to keep their communities attractive to visitors. "Each of these projects involve key facilities that help their communities remain vibrant, charming and attractive to visitors seeking quality experiences," said Baumgart.

Since 1995, TIIP grants have provided over \$3 million in tourism "bed tax" funds to 67 projects in 41 Montana communities. These TIIP-assisted projects represent a total investment of \$39 million of public and private funds into Montana's tourism-related infrastructure.

TIIP grants funds are provided by a 4% state tourism "bed tax" which is assessed on the lodging price of all accommodations across Montana, including campgrounds. The grants are awarded through a competitive process and require a \$1 local match for every \$2 provided by grant funds.

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